



GlobELT: An International Conference on Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language, Antalya - Turkey

Forming students' linguistic and cultural competence in academic translation and interpretation studies

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Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of forming students' linguistic and cultural competence via the integration of courses in Linguistics and Culture Studies into the Bachelor's Programme in Translation and Interpretation Studies for undergraduate students. To grant a well-grounded inference the authors have built a model that discovers the peculiarities of integrative linguistic and cultural approach to teaching the soon-to-be translators and interpreters, the ones who do not only speak several languages fluently but demonstrate complete awareness of their cultural background. A number of fundamental research reports referred to in the article have proved that the core concept of Linguistics and Culture Studies integration lies in the axiological and semantic properties of the language and culture coded in Art as a cultural activity. The authors outline the structural components of the integrative competence-building model and provide teachers with technologies that determine the proper students' learning outcomes in academic Translation and Interpretation Studies. The model is being successfully realized within a cluster of courses in Country and Culture Studies as well as in English Oral and Written Speech Practice classes at the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation Studies and World Cultural Heritage (Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation). Thus the report reveals the results of the research that is unique for its theoretical approach and supported by twenty years of practice and observations of the authors in the academic environment. The students' performance analysis and the findings yield the conclusion that the integrative and interactive model appears crucial for building the students' professional skills and awareness of social and cultural significance of their vocation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Hacettepe Üniversitesi.

Keywords: linguistic and cultural competence, multicultural personality, axiological and semantic properties, integrative and interactive model

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1. Introduction

In today's multicultural world, when the importance of learning a foreign language as a means of communication is increasing, the issue of forming a linguistic and cultural competence of the soon-to-be translators/ interpreters has become particularly relevant as it is not enough to be a fluent in a foreign language. It is important to comprehend the mentality and culture of the people speaking the language to overcome the cultural barrier generated by the national peculiarities of the communicators and to be ready for professional and personal communication with representatives of other countries.

Modern multicultural world sets a challenging and important mission for an interpreter, i.e. to act as an ambassador of culture and provide understanding between parties in an intercultural dialogue. However, the main difficulty in such a matter is the mentality of the author of the original text and the translator/interpreter that may not fully coincide since they are based on each person's knowledge and views of life. Therefore, the translator/interpreter must be able to freely navigate information and semantic, semiotic, symbolic and axiological multicultural environment. To do this, they must overcome the boundaries of narrow professional linguistic thinking and develop a system of cultural thinking on the basis of which linguistic and cultural competence is formed.

The 20-year-old teaching experience in delivering academic courses in Linguistics and Culture Studies has revealed that the level of general cultural awareness of undergraduate student-interpreters is considerably low. The majority of students do not possess deep background knowledge, or the ability to adequately decode concrete manifestations of cultural meanings and symbols of cultural artefacts, or detect implicit social and regulatory meanings encoded in translation end products; they do not possess basic cultural concepts and are not able to competently and adequately interpret them or disclose their contents and highlight the main features; they know little about both the etiquette of their motherland and a foreign country; they do not have the required practical skills to communicate on a personal and intercultural levels. They have a poor command of non-verbal forms of communication; they have not developed visual-shaped, associative, or systemic cultural thinking. The level of general cultural knowledge and competencies is low; they tend to express emotions about the recognition and not the content of a work of art; evaluation is often trivial in nature; they have difficulty in establishing the associative-shaped relationship between the native and foreign languages; they are not always competent in making judgments about the spiritual and moral values of the world and national and regional cultural heritage; they are reluctant to deal with various works of art and have little interest thereto.

All the above said allows us to conclude the existence of contradictions between the requirements of modern society, educational system and personal development, professional competence of a translator/interpreter, and lack of interest in the process.

Thus there arises a problem of how to meet the demand of society and train competent translators/interpreters that will be capable of intercultural communication in modern multicultural society and will be fully aware of the social and cultural importance of their profession.

In our opinion, one of the solutions to the problem is to introduce a model that will reflect the specifics of an integrative approach to the linguistic and cultural development of a multicultural language personality. It will help create integrative space for academic courses related to linguistic and cultural studies and develop a holistic and systemic vision of the world of an interpreter. Consequently, their level of linguistic and cultural competence will allow to successfully and flexibly adapt to the modern multicultural world.

To achieve this goal we have introduced a model that will develop the linguistic and cultural competence of a translator/interpreter in a single linguistic and cultural communicative educational process in the system of higher education.

The goal of this study is to design a model aimed at the formation of linguistic and cultural competence of a translator/interpreter in a single linguistic, social and cultural communicative educational process and university.

The following methods were used: analysis of the issue based on the study of philosophical, linguistic, psychological and educational, cultural, sociological, methodological literature, the analysis of curricula and textbooks, federal state educational standards of higher professional education, summarizing of our own experience, pedagogical supervision, cultural research practices (structural and functional, dialectical, semiotic, comparative, typological, system, etc.).

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